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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2017

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SUBJECT: SARKOZY SENDS WARM CONGRATULATIONS TO PUTIN ON
DUMA ELECTIONS

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Damien Loras, Deputy Diplomatic Advisor for the Americas, Russia, Balkans, Caucuses, and Central Asia, told POL M/C on December 4 that, as reported in the press, President Sarkozy had indeed called and warmly congratulated President Putin on the Duma elections. Terming Sarkozy and Putin friends, Loras said Sarkozy called Putin as one statesman to another. The GOF, he added, is not seeking to conceal the conversation.

¶2. (C) Loras explained that while Sarkozy understands that there were electoral irregularities and violations, he also believes that the Russian people love Putin. Sarkozy believes France must acknowledge that Putin has significant support in Russia or the GOF risks losing credibility vis--vis Russia. (Note: The French MFA has publicly taken note of the irregularities and called on Russia to investigate.)

¶3. (C) This is not a major shift in French policy, Loras told us. The reality, he said, is that we need to learn to live with Putin because he will wield considerable power in Russia for years to come.

¶4. (C) Loras noted that Sarkozy made the call despite contrary advice from his staff.

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